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Frame Analysis: Students' Construction of Involvement and Noninvolvement in the College Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Frames and frame analysis examines the individual's constructions of reality instead of society's social constructions. The aim of this qualitative study is to explore college students' (N = 434) construction of involvement and noninvolvement in the classroom from a frame analysis perspective. Six themes emerged from students' descriptions of their perceptions of self and other students' in-class involvement (e.g., active involvement), and eight themes emerged from descriptions of self and other students' in-class noninvolvement (e.g., student passivity). Overall, students are likely to perceive themselves as involved and other students as noninvolved, even when the classroom behaviors are similar (e.g., listening, taking notes).

In her editorial, *Creeping Passivity*, Ann Cutler (2007) noticed a disturbing trend in her college classrooms: never before had she experienced such nonparticipation. Even though her classes consisted of a larger-than-usual number of students who were well prepared for the college classroom experience, she stated, "students were stunningly disengaged" (p. 6). Cutler further wrote that her students just sat there silently, taking whatever she was handing out, as questions were asked or uncertainties probed. Worried that she was becoming overbearing or nonimmediate, Cutler questioned her colleagues who also stated they were experiencing the same silent passivity in the classrooms as well. She was concerned that the classroom climate was shifting to one of student noninvolvement.

Cutler's (2007) editorial received an avalanche of responses. The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA, 2007) website posted teachers' comments and experiences from all levels of education. For example, an Educational Technologist at the University of Delaware, stated, "Getting any students at all to be responsive—to me or to each other—was like pulling teeth. Was I using PowerPoint too much? Was I boring everyone? Was I burning out and losing my enthusiasm?" (NSTA, 2007, para. 1). An Associate Professor of Earth Sciences at University of Indianapolis wrote:

I ask a question directed to the whole class and there is no response, no volunteering of answers; after a little wait[ing] I call on one person and the answer given is "I don't

know,” even if it is a fairly open-ended question about something they probably did experience or observe. After several more “I don't knows” and not without some prompting in a Socratic type of way, I just give up. Then it is back to the old lecture mode. (para. 48)

Some of the feedback posted also offered insight for enhancing student involvement in the college classroom, such as in-class activities or small group discussions. Overall, the numerous postings on the NSTA (2007) website captured the extensive problem of passivity in the college classroom.

Post-secondary institutions are transforming classrooms from being teacher-centered to student-centered (Huba & Freed, 2000). Even though Cutler's (2007) editorial and the subsequent feedback centered on the experience of science courses, student performance should be considered the most important outcome of any classroom experience (Hirschy & Wilson, 2002; Page & Mukherjee, 2000). Therefore involvement is a campus-wide responsibility (Hunter, 2006). Hence, it is essential that educators and scholars across disciplines consider student involvement from the students' lens in an effort to promote student learning and improve overall student performance. However, Page and Mukherjee (2000) stated, “While the goal is clear and laudable, its achievement is not easy because the typical undergraduate student is apathetic about education” (p. 548). The aim of this study is to explore students' construction of involvement and noninvolvement in the college classroom from a frame analysis lens.

Student Involvement

Student involvement in the college classroom has implications for educational processes and learning outcomes. Astin (1999) defined student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). Astin, in an interview with Richmond (1986), indicated higher education is in competition with other forces for students' energy such as job and family, and it is imperative for colleges and universities to prevail in this competition. Astin (1993, 1999) also differentiated between highly involved and noninvolved students. Students who are highly involved devote a great deal of energy to studying, spend a lot of time on campus, actively participate in student organizations, and regularly interact with faculty and other students. On the other hand, noninvolved students neglect studies, are hardly ever on campus, do not participate in student organizations, and have little contact with faculty and other students. Astin developed the theory of student involvement in part to guide researchers in their investigation of student development and as well as to assist college administrators and faculty in their design of more effective learning environments.

Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement centers on the behavioral aspects of involvement. As he puts it, “it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement” (p. 519).

Astin contended involvement is a behavioral construct, and he offered an extensive list of active terms that reflect his notion of student involvement. To better understand what involvement

means, Astin's list included such active terms as: attach one's self to; engage in; participate in; take an interest in; devote oneself to; and tackle.

Tinto (1997) stated student involvement matters, in that the greater the involvement in college life the greater the acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. Moreover, student involvement with faculty enhances their development (Astin, 1993). Likewise, Endo and Harpel (1982) found students who reported higher levels of involvement with their instructors also demonstrated higher levels of learning gain. Moreover, Milem and Berger (1997) advocated early involvement with faculty since it tends to have a positive influence on student persistence. Thus, when students are involved in their courses they are more apt to learn and succeed (Smith & Wolf-Wendel, 2005; Kuh, 2007). When students become engaged they "develop habits that promise to stand them in good stead for a lifetime of continuous learning" (Kuh, p. B12). As Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) stated, involvement is not only important while students are in college but it will help to prepare them for life after college. Similarly, Weaver and Qi (2005) wrote, "Students who actively participate in the learning process learn more than those who do not" (p. 570). Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) referred to students speaking in class by asking and answering questions, making comments, and participating in discussions as class participation. Petress (2006) offered an operational definition of class participation, stating, "Optimum class management and effectiveness depends on students being actively engaged, supportive of each other, and civil in their exchanges" (p. 821). Petress also framed class participation as encompassing three evaluative dimensions: quantity, dependability, and quality. Quantity does not mean that some students should become discussion monopolizers. However, all students should be given the opportunity to participate by asking questions, offering examples, and supplying evidence of personal awareness of topic concepts. Students should also be dependable; they need to regularly attend class in order to participate. When they are in class they need to actively attend to the day's topic. For quality, students should not ask questions for the sake of it (e.g., superficial questions). Contributions to class discussion should be meaningful and relevant.

Class participation can come in many forms, and Wade (1994) stated that an ideal class discussion happens when almost all students are engaged and interested, are learning, and listening attentively to their peer's comments and suggestions. From the students' point of view there are also many reasons why they choose to participate or to not participate. Howard and Henney (1998) found, from interviews and surveys, why student participate or why they do not participate in the classroom. The top four reasons for participation were: seeking information or clarification; have something to contribute to class; learning by participating; and overall enjoyment in participation. The top four reasons for nonparticipation were: ideas not well formulated; lack of knowledge about the subject matter; likelihood of appearing unintelligent in the eyes of other students; and not doing the assigned reading.

Frames, Framing, and Involvement

Erving Goffman (1974) wrote *Frame Analysis: An essay on the Organization of Experience* as a sort of calling into being of the theory that had informed his expansive body of work—most notably *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman (1974) offered the following as a definition for his body of work's informing theory, frame and frame analysis:

I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame. My phrase 'frame analysis' is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience. (pp. 10-11)

Goffman's frames and frame analysis focus on the individual's organization of experience, not society. In postmodern terms, frames and frame analysis examines the individual's constructions of reality instead of society's social constructions. Our frameworks allow us to make sense of what is happening around us based on our prior experience. Primary frameworks are the frameworks that, when combined with other similarly socialized individuals, constitute a portion of that social group's culture. As we move through situations in our lives, according to Goffman, we refer to frames for information on how to proceed. Frames determine the way that we are able to think about a situation, how we respond, and what our participation and involvement will be.

In terms of classroom participation, a frame "organizes involvement" (Goffman, 1974, p. 345). As individuals make sense of the situation they find themselves in, "participants will ordinarily not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also (in some degree) become spontaneously engrossed, caught up, enthralled" (Goffman, 1974, p. 345). Within frames are the rules and norms for levels of participation unique to that situation. All frames have different levels of participation expectations because these frames are unique, but "in all cases ... understood limits will be established, a definition concerning what is insufficient involvement and what is too much" (Goffman, 1974, p. 345). No frame is without an expectation for level of participation.

When individuals are not involved at the frame-determined level, others will react negatively according to the frame parameters. This isn't to say that if in the classroom some students are not participating that others will encourage the participation. That would only hold true if the students in the classroom framed the classroom situation as having a necessity for involvement at the level that the instructor expects in his/her own frame. Therefore, it must be recognized that students can and probably will have differing frames from instructors concerning involvement.

Goffman (1974) calls involvement an "interlocking obligation" (p. 346). Breaking the frame more likely will manifest as students in the class participating too much. If the frame that the students appear to adhere to calls for very low levels of involvement in the situation (the classroom), then those who do not participate minimally are the ones breaking the frame. In effect, high participation and involvement in the framed situation means less manifested

participation/involvement in the eyes of the teacher. Those who are adhering to the frame will stand against those who do not. Goffman says, "Whether the individual maintains too little or too much involvement, he [sic] will have reason to manage the show of his [sic] involvement in order to minimize its disruptive effect on participants" (1974, p. 346). He also notes, "Some deviation from the norm is tolerated" (pp. 346-347). This could account for classes that appear to always participate well according to the instructor's frame standards.

According to Goffman's (1974) frame theory, if participation (involvement) from students was ever framed the same as instructors' frame, then the frame of non-participating was broken. Reframing is the positive result of a broken frame. At some point, "for whatever reasons, the individual breaks frame and perceives he [sic] has done so, the nature of his engrossment and belief suddenly changes" (p. 378). Everyone who has not rejected the frame faces the individual rejecting the frame. If framing is to provide insight to lack of classroom participation, the framing of the classroom from the student's perspective must be examined. This should be accomplished by examining students' perceptions of classroom participation in terms of others and self.

For this study, undergraduate students were asked to react to the issue of involvement/noninvolvement in the college classroom. Since numerous postings on the NSTA (2007, July) website captured the extensive problem of passivity in the college classroom from the instructors' lens, this study examined the issue from the students' lens. Open-ended questions served to elicit the student's perspective of whether or not involvement existed in the college classroom. Moreover, students were asked to describe why involvement does or does not exist in the college classroom. The research question asked:

RQ1: What are students' perceptions of involvement/noninvolvement in the college classroom?

To address this question, participants responded to several open-ended questions:

- In general do you consider yourself to be involved in the classroom?
- If yes, describe how you are involved. If no, describe how you are not involved?
- In general, do you think other students are involved in the classroom?
- If yes, how are students involved. If no, how are students not involved?

Beyond looking at *how*, a secondary question addressed *why* students are involved or noninvolved. Following the first question, students were asked why they are involved in the college classroom or why they think other students in general are involved in the college classroom. These open-ended questions yielded a thick description of student in-class involvement/ noninvolvement from the students' point of view. Also, by asking students to describe perceptions of their involvement and of other students' involvement helped to determine if attribution differs between descriptions of self and descriptions of others. Attribution theory offers an explanation for how we make sense of our own behaviors as well as other's behaviors. Attribution theory suggests when explaining our own behaviors we use external attributions in

which our behaviors are caused by external circumstances or environmental factors. In contrast, when explaining other's behaviors we use internal attributions, in which their behaviors are caused by internal factors, thus the individual is responsible for the behavior (McPherson, Kearney, & Plax, 2006).

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

Participants consisted of 434 ($n = 201$ males, $n = 233$ females) undergraduate students across academic ranks ($n = 75$ freshmen, $n = 106$ sophomores, $n = 141$ juniors, $n = 112$ seniors), in introductory and upper-level communication courses at a research intensive public university. The students voluntarily participated and survey administration took place during normal class time. Participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, anonymous, and neither their class standing nor athletic status was affected if they decided not to participate in part or wholly in the study. The university's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) approved this study.

The students' mean age was 20.40 ($SD = 1.92$), range 17 to 39. For freshmen, the mean age was 18.31 ($SD = .49$), sophomores ($M = 19.70$, $SD = 1.35$), juniors ($M = 20.72$, $SD = 1.77$), and seniors ($M = 21.98$, $SD = 1.38$). The majority of the sample was Caucasian ($n = 393$), 14 identified as African American, 14 as Hispanic or Latino, six as Asian, two as Native American, one as Pacific Islander, and two as Other. Overall, the majority of the sample consisted of full-time students ($n = 428$ full-time, $n = 3$ part-time, $n = 3$ no response), who had a variety of different majors ($N = 54$).

Coding

The research question examined students' perceptions of involvement in the college classroom. Students responded to open-ended questions, which asked them to describe their perceptions of student involvement in the college classroom. This study followed basic interpretative qualitative research. After a content analysis of student responses, participants' written responses were grouped based on similarities of statements in order to allow themes to naturally emerge from the open-ended questions.

Several steps were undertaken to code the open-ended responses describing in-class involvement/ noninvolvement. The multi-stage framework was based on Bulmer's (1979) guidelines. The first author read and re-read participants' responses to the questions referring to other student's in-class involvement/ noninvolvement and their responses to their own in-class involvement/ noninvolvement. Given participants just elaborated from the first question to the second question, the two questions for other students' in-class involvement/ noninvolvement were collapsed. Similarly, the participants often elaborated from the first question to the second

question when describing their own in-class involvement or noninvolvement. Thus, those two questions were also collapsed. Again, all responses were examined and non-repetitive units were transferred to index cards. With over 400 descriptions for each question, the study reached data saturation; the researcher no longer saw new information in students' responses. Then the cards were sorted into preliminary conceptual themes. A communication faculty member subsequently reviewed the deck of cards in order to identify conceptual overlap, gaps, or unique perspectives on the emerging themes. A codebook was created, and all students' responses were re-examined and coded into either involvement or noninvolvement themes (Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix). Six themes emerged from students' descriptions of their perceptions of self and other students' in-class involvement (Table 1) and eight themes emerged from descriptions of self and other students' in-class noninvolvement (Table 2). Finally, the first author examined all sorts and organized the final involvement/ noninvolvement category structure, with examples, for coding. These themes addressed students' perceptions of involvement/ noninvolvement in the college classroom.

Again, there were six involvement themes that emerged from students' descriptions. The first theme was *Active Involvement*. This theme included such descriptions as talking one-on-one with the instructor, discussions in small groups, offering opinions, sharing ideas and experiences, and asking and answering questions. The second theme was *Passive Involvement*, and included such descriptions as doing homework, listening, paying attention, taking notes, and showing up to class on time. The third theme was *Instructor Factors*. Students offered such descriptions as: calls on students, creates a positive atmosphere, is open and caring, and offers opportunities for engagement for this theme. The fourth theme was *Course Type & Structure*, which included such descriptions as it's a course in my major, it's a smaller class, and participation is a requirement for a grade. The fifth theme was *Outcomes for Involvement*. This theme included such descriptions as helping others to learn, helps make a better class environment, makes class interesting, and enhances learning. Lastly, the sixth theme was *Student Factors*, which included descriptions such as personality of students, I do it more than others, no one else will do it so I will, students do it when they are comfortable, knowledgeable about topic, and academic rank.

There were eight themes for noninvolvement that emerged from students' responses. The first theme was *Student Passivity*, which included such descriptions as no verbal participation in class, I just sit there and take notes, just want the information, just there for the grade, and prefer to listen. The second theme was *Student Factors ~ Self*. For this theme students offered such responses as hate the spotlight, shy, lazy, poor attention span, I have no initiative, and don't take the class seriously. The third theme was *Student Factors ~ Others*, which included such descriptions as peer influence to be quiet, not comfortable with peers, and rely on others to talk. The fourth theme was *Instructor Factors*. For this theme students offered such descriptions as instructor just lectures, instructor isn't a good teacher, teacher doesn't force it, and teacher rushes through the material. The fifth theme was *Course Type & Structure*, which included descriptions such as class is too large, class isn't exciting, and class is a requirement. The sixth theme was *Alternatives to Involvement*, and for this theme descriptions included distractions (e.g., cell

phones, laptops, and newspapers), sleeping in class, not doing the readings, and not attending class. The seventh theme was *Lack of Perceived Benefits*. This theme included such descriptions as no reward for doing it, just want to get by, no value for involvement, and it's not that important. Finally, the eighth theme was *Fear of Negative Repercussions*, which included descriptions like don't want to be judged, don't want to be laughed at by peers or teacher, fear of being wrong, and fear of looking dumb.

Results

To address the first part of the research question, 426 participants offered descriptions of other students' involvement/ noninvolvement in the college classroom. For perceptions of their peers, 75 participants indicated that both involvement and noninvolvement existed in the college classroom, 122 participants described only involvement and 230 participants described only noninvolvement.

A total of 195 participants, including those that indicated both involvement and noninvolvement existed, offered 362 descriptions of their perceptions of other students' in-class involvement. In order of descending frequency, 33.7% of the participants described other students' involvement as Active Involvement ($n = 122$); 27.3% described involvement as Outcomes of Involvement ($n = 99$); 12.7% described involvement as Student Factors ($n = 46$); 9.9% described involvement as Passive Involvement ($n = 36$); 9.1% described involvement as Course Type & Structure ($n = 33$); and 7.2% described involvement as Instructor Factors ($n = 26$).

A total of 296 participants offered 590 descriptions of their perceptions of other students' in-class noninvolvement. In order of descending frequency, 23.9% of the participants described other students' noninvolvement as Student Factors ~ Self ($n = 141$); 21.5% described noninvolvement as Student Passivity ($n = 127$); 17.1% described noninvolvement as Course Type & Structure ($n = 101$); 8.1% described noninvolvement as Fear of Negative Repercussions ($n = 48$); 8% described noninvolvement as Instructor Factors ($n = 47$); 7.3% described noninvolvement as Student Factors ~ Others ($n = 43$); 7.1% described noninvolvement as Alternatives to Involvement ($n = 42$); and 6.9% described noninvolvement as Lack of Perceived Benefits ($n = 41$).

Next, 432 of the participants offered descriptions of their own involvement/ noninvolvement in the college classroom. For perceptions of themselves, 52 participants indicated that both involvement and noninvolvement existed in the college classroom, 254 participants described only involvement and 126 participants described only noninvolvement.

A total of 306 participants offered 615 descriptions of their perceptions of their in-class involvement. In order of descending frequency, 24.4% of the participants described their involvement as Active Involvement ($n = 150$); 24.2% described involvement as Outcomes of Involvement ($n = 149$); 18.5% described involvement as Passive Involvement ($n = 114$); 13.1%

described involvement as Student Factors ($n = 81$); 10.1% described involvement as Course Type & Structure ($n = 62$); and 9.6% described involvement as Instructor Factors ($n = 59$).

A total of 178 participants offered 314 descriptions of their perceptions of their own in-class noninvolvement. In order of descending frequency, 28.6% of the participants described their noninvolvement as Student Passivity ($n = 90$); 23.5% described noninvolvement as Student Factors ~ Self ($n = 74$); 14.6% described noninvolvement as Course Type & Structure ($n = 46$); 9.2% described noninvolvement as Student Factors ~ Others ($n = 29$); 7.9% described noninvolvement as Lack of Perceived Benefits ($n = 25$); 7.6% described noninvolvement as Instructor Factors ($n = 24$); 5.7% described noninvolvement as Fear of Negative Repercussions ($n = 18$); and 2.5% described noninvolvement as Alternatives to Involvement ($n = 8$).

Discussion

Overall, students are likely to perceive themselves as involved and other students as noninvolved. Interestingly, students were also likely to perceive other students who just listen and take notes in class as noninvolvement (Student Passivity) while, in contrast, they reported their in-class listening and note taking as involvement (Passive Involvement). The way they perceived their behaviors and other students' behaviors in the classroom was not similar.

Based on students' written responses of their perceptions of self and others' involvement and noninvolvement in the college classroom, six involvement themes emerged and eight noninvolvement themes emerged. Overall, students were more likely to perceive themselves as involved and other students as noninvolved.

The instructors played a vital role in encouraging student involvement. Students described being more involved when their instructors offered opportunities for engagement such as calling on students for feedback or using a discussion format instead of a lecture format in class. For example, one student stated, "I'm more involved when the teacher is good, the teacher talks with the students and asks questions," on the other hand, another student commented, "sometimes it's impossible for involvement when the teacher rushes through the material, there's just not time for it."

Some students reported that they were not actively involved in class because they knew if they did have questions or did not understand content they could wait till after class to ask their instructors for clarification. One student wrote, "I'm not really talkative in class, if I don't understand what's going on I just wait until after class is over and ask my teacher about it." Another student stated, "I'm not very comfortable speaking up in class so when I have questions I ask them after class is over."

Students who described themselves or others as noninvolved often stated they or others did not want to be in the classroom. One student offered this response to noninvolvement, "Classes are too big, you have such a big audience to present information to and little time to do it in. Students just want to take the class, pass it, and move on. [The] quicker [we're] done with college, the better." If students, who are not involved and do not want to be in class, believe their

instructors will deviate from a lecture when questions are asked may be less likely to ask questions. Question-asking takes up time and may increase the time students spend in class. Students who do not want to be there may avoid asking questions so that class will end as soon as possible. As one student put it, "It seems that the majority of college students just do the bare minimum to get by with the ultimate goal of getting that diploma." These responses are based on the traditional classroom. Mediated communication (e.g., e-mail, *Facebook*) may be changing the perceptions of student involvement. Future research should consider students' responses from the online setting to compare to involvement in the traditional classroom setting.

Beyond the instructor, course type and structure influenced student in-class involvement. For this study, students reported more frequent in-class involvement in smaller classes than larger classes. Prior research has indicated class size can influence the classroom experience (Chatman, 1997). There is an inverse relationship between size and performance, in which the larger the class size the worse students perform (Chatman, 1997; Gibbs & Lucas, 1996). Moreover, students in large classes report a lack of involvement, lack of individualized attention from instructor, and an inhibition of student-instructor communication (Smith, Kopfman, & Ahyun, 1996). Similarly, Kendrick and Darling (1990) found an inverse relationship between class size and student clarifying tactics (e.g., question-asking). In larger class sizes clarifying tactics decrease. Neer and Kircher (1989) found classroom participation and discussion were mediated by interpersonal familiarity and acceptance. Students were more comfortable communicating in small groups rather than with the entire class. However, previous research offers mixed results concerning class size in that student performance and classroom interactions were not necessarily a function of class size (Toth & Montagna, 2002). For example, Papo (1999) indicated larger class sizes do not negatively affect students' perceptions of teaching effectiveness and that perceptions of learning are based more on teaching methods rather than student enrollment. In their responses to the open-ended questions on involvement, many students referred to class size, one student stated, "Now that I am taking classes that are smaller and in my major I find I am a lot more involved than I was before in larger classes." These students' statements also coincide with their reports for nonparticipation, in that the nonparticipation measure item, "the class is too large," yielded the highest mean compared to the other nonparticipation measure items.

Not only did course type and structure play a role in involvement, student factors also had an impact on involvement. Many students offered several reasons for noninvolvement in the classroom such as being shy or nervous. For noninvolvement, a student offered, "No, it seems that at this university most students are either afraid to speak up or just choose not to, especially in larger classes." Some students may experience communication apprehension in the classroom. Communication apprehension (CA), defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78), can be experienced in four general communication contexts: interpersonal, small group, large meeting, and public speaking. McCroskey surveyed 20,000 college students, and found 15 to 20% suffered from high communication apprehension, which

was severe enough to interfere with their normal functioning in the classroom. Booth-Butterfield (1988) stated, "students with CA will feel anxious and wish to avoid communicating in most situations" (p. 214). Thus, students with high CA are at a much greater disadvantage in the classroom than students with low or even moderate levels of communication apprehension (Bourhis & Allen, 1992). Allen, Long, O'Mara, and Judd (2008) found high CA students reported less satisfaction with their instructors and believed they learned less in the classroom. For some students, the effects of communication apprehension are debilitating to the learning process (Edwards & Walker, 2007). This is reinforced in this study as some students reported being too shy to actively involve themselves in the classroom.

However, there may be other *post hoc* explanations for using shyness or nervousness as a reason for noninvolvement. Another explanation may be students engage in learned helplessness. The Theory of Learned Helplessness refers to deficits in thoughts, feelings, and actions; exposure to uncontrollable events; or the cognitive account of how the operations lead to the deficits (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993). Coined by Martin Seligman, it is considered a psychological condition in which individuals believe they are helpless in a particular situation (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Three critical components serve as a foundation for the theory: contingency, cognition, and behavior. Contingency consists of the objective relationship between individuals' actions and the outcomes of those actions. The cognition component is reflected in the way individuals interpret and explain the contingency. Behavior is the observable consequences of the contingency and the cognition about it. Peterson et al. (1993) claim that "learned helplessness has been used in three ways: to refer to noncontingency, to the expectation of helplessness, and to passive behavior" (p. 9). Individuals engage in passivity when they learn that responding to an event is futile. However, individuals can also learn to be helpless through the observations of others and may not necessarily be exposed to the uncontrollable event. Moreover, Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder (1982) suggested the helplessness theory offers individuals the opportunity to reframe diminished control over events. Helplessness enables people to sustain secondary control over events in which they lost primary control. Overall, primary control is likely to be an individual's first response to uncontrollability. If that fails, then secondary control may succeed. According to Peterson et al., "If a person is able to accept uncontrollable events and derive meaning from them, then he [she] will not be disrupted by them" (p. 137). For example, a secondary control, termed *illusionary control* does not directly influence events; however, the individual still believes events are orderly. In essence, the individual believes that "fate deals the cards, but it is possible to synchronize oneself with fate" (Peterson et al., p. 137). Individuals deny themselves personal control over events. Essentially, helplessness allows individuals to find meaning when confronted with negative events, and the found meaning or answer creates an adaptive situation.

Individuals engage in learned helplessness when they believe they can do nothing to make a difference, have little or no power over themselves or external events. When students reported being too shy to engage in in-class involvement they may just be using "shyness" as a form of learned helplessness to make sense of their passive behaviors and externalize attribution.

A third explanation for using shyness or nervousness as a reason for noninvolvement is self-handicapping. Self-handicapping involves creating barriers to successful performance (Leondari & Gonida, 2007). This allows individuals to provide themselves with an excuse for poor performance (Waschbusch, Craig, Pelham, & King, 2007), and enables them to externalize attribution (e.g., “I can’t talk in class because I’m too shy”). Self-handicapping protects individuals’ self-worth and is more likely to occur when individuals perceive the task performance as a reflection of themselves (Midgley, Arunkumar, & Urdan, 1996). Ommundsen, Haugen, and Lund (2005) offered the example, “Some students deliberately put off studying to the last moment, or use other ‘self-handicapping’ strategies, so that if the subsequent performance is at a low level, these circumstances, rather than the lack of ability, may be considered the cause” (p. 462). Self-handicapping strategies can take on different forms, such as behavioral self-handicaps and self-reported self-handicaps. Students who report a lack of sleep or being “hung over” engage in behavioral self-handicapping, while students who claim test or social anxieties engage in self-reported self-handicapping. These strategies may offer the immediate benefit of self-protection but Zuckerman and Tsai (2005) found self-handicapping is costly to individuals over time. The researchers found self-handicappers reported a loss in competence satisfaction, which mediated a relationship between self-handicapping and a negative mood. Across four studies, Zuckerman and Tsai discovered there are several negative consequences for self-handicappers; overall, they scored lower on measures of health and well-being, higher on negative mood and symptoms, and lower on intrinsic motivation. Self-handicapping typically makes a bad situation worse as individuals discount responsibility for their failures or poor performances. Thus, if individuals rationalize their lack of in-class involvement with such reasons as shyness or nervousness they may be setting themselves up for future academic failure.

Some students did indicate they were involved in the college classroom but they did not offer any indication they were actively involved. Astin (1999) argued involvement was a behavioral construct, and offered a list of active terms that reflected his notion of student involvement. Astin believed how the students behave is part of the involvement definition. Moreover, following Astin’s idea that involvement occurs on a continuum, students’ reports of involvement did range from passive involvement to active involvement. From the students’ perspective in-class involvement can include arriving on time for class to participating in small group discussions. However, passive involvement counters Cutler’s (2007) idea of involvement. For Cutler and the many college-level instructors who responded to her editorial (NSTA, 2007) passive involvement is just not enough. There may be a disconnection between student’s expectations for in-class involvement and their instructors’ expectations. One student wrote, “They never teach you to be involved in class at any lower level of education. Then, when you get to college teachers want feedback and discussion, [which] is not part of people’s normal classroom behavior.” Instructors may need to communicate more clearly what involvement means and how students need to be engaged in the classroom. Moreover, it is also essential for faculty and students to realize involvement and noninvolvement are separate dimensions and not

two ends of one continuum. As Astin (1999) indicated, involvement is a continuum, ranging from passive to active. Even if students are passively involved they are at least still engaged in the classroom (e.g., listening). Students who are noninvolved are disengaged. This disengagement includes not attending class or reading a newspaper in class and not listening to the instructor or other students.

Fortunately, many students did report being actively involved in the college classroom. Students' active involvement descriptions ranged from occasionally asking questions or offering answers to frequently being engaged in class discussions. Moreover, they offered a variety of reasons for their active involvement. One student stated, "I believe I am involved. Being a senior, I am comfortable with college; I will speak up, answer questions because I know it makes the process smoother for myself, the professor, and the class." Another student offered, "Really depends on the class, number of students, and teaching style. But yes, when interaction takes place I'm involved." Students who were involved seem to realize that involvement was essential to their academic success. They reported that when they were involved in class, they performed successfully on tests and earned better grades. A student wrote, "I know it's a great chance to be in college and I want to take advantage of it. I want to learn as much as I can, so I try to be involved." These positive learning outcomes coincide with Tinto's (1997) argument that the greater involvement in college life, the greater the acquisition of knowledge and development of skills.

Discussing Frames of Involvement

Frames are the organization of individual's experiences in life (Goffman, 1974). The experience that someone has had informs his/her frames. These frames will then inform the individual on how to behave when he/she experiences a specific situation. Frames, in this study, do little to provide solid understanding of student's specific behaviors. However, examining the results of this study in terms of frames provides opportunities for further critical thought and research through stimulating theorizing student's behaviors, which often raises further questions for future research.

First, thinking about involvement as a behavior moderated through individual's frames promotes a degree of reflexivity. That is, do teacher and student frames align? Because experiences in life dictate how people react in situations, it is likely that the frames of teachers and students are different. This would mean that the expectations that the instructor has might not be able to be met because the student's expectations are so different. Questioning the alignment of frames between teacher and student becomes critical when investigating expectations. If teacher expectations hinge upon a frame that is vastly different or in opposition from students, then teacher expectations will not be met.

Frames rely on involvement and participation within the frame when it is called upon, but this doesn't mean that students are told to participate in a situation by talking, asking questions, doing homework, etc. What it means is that there are expectations for a certain performance. If

the frame of the classroom calls for the student to sit quietly and do nothing, then he/she is involved and participating (in his/her frame) when the/she is doing nothing in the eyes of the teacher. This calls for an increased awareness from teachers about students' expectations of the class. But the expectations of the student, as students convey them, might still not be his/her role in the classroom. This possibility can be seen when comparing the responses that students gave concerning their perceptions of other students.

While some students labeled participation in the classroom the way that a teacher might, others labeled their passive behaviors as participation. This example alone provides a minimum of three frames. If students are in stark contrast with what qualifies as their participation in class, then this evidences the existence of multiple frames. If the issues of participation in class were nonexistent, then one might assume that teachers and students are operating using the same frame. But this is unlikely because frames are constructed through individual experience. It is likely for frames to differ minimally. In fact, Goffman (1974) says that some variance is allowed and usually present, but it is tolerated. Variances between students in frames is generally tolerated while the variance between teacher and student frames are less tolerated. The current study represents that.

The size of the classroom and numbers of students in the class was identified as a point of disagreement. It stands to reason that individuals are more likely to prefer smaller class sizes, as this is what colleges and universities advertise, when present, as good. It is unlikely that a college or university will advertise large class sizes of 200 people. The connotation of this is bad. However, if the connotation were good, then colleges and universities would likely advertise this and students' frames would reflect this. Frames might account for those who prefer large class sizes by citing what Goffman (1974) called "negative experience" (p. 378). A negative experience, such as suffering a humiliation in a class, might be enough to cause a frame change to enjoy larger classes where they might not be noticed. But what about classes where participation is good?

While frames may inform involvement in the frame as manifesting in non-class participation, the frame likely also recognizes that the teacher has power that should be respected at a varying degree. Thus, even if a student's frame is one with little participation in class, the student's frame might still tell them that the teacher has power in the classroom and he/she should do as told. This could account for students saying that their participation was dependent on the teacher's style and whether or not it is encouraged. Student frames might have a provision for involvement being lack of in-class participation until the teacher tells them that they have to. The frame says no class participation, but it also says the teacher can make me do things that he/she chooses. Frames provide many theoretical explanations for the way students behave in the classroom situation and offers insight as to why teachers perceive involvement or non-involvement on the part of students.

Conclusions

The findings from the student responses are rich in many ways. Students who perceive that they participate in the classroom might be perceived by others as not participating. Participants also indicated that they would participate if the environment was correct or the teacher made them. It is important to take away the differences in perception between teachers and even fellow students. Increasing classroom involvement might be as simple as telling students to be more involved. However, it might also be much more complicated. If the primary frame for navigating the situation of the college classroom calls for involvement in the frame by not participating in class, then this risks becoming the dominant culture (if this has not already happened). This is important to note because students far outnumber faculty. For this reason, it is paramount for teachers to understand the most about student frames to adapt.

The main limitation of this research is the make-up of the sample. Using all students in introductory courses provides a wide range of participants. Including upper level classes with communication majors runs the risk of including people who will differ from the non-major student because of a better understanding of communication. Therefore, future research should focus on a population with no particular areas to cause strong discrepancy, a sample of students that is more similar to each other in demographic makeup. Additionally, more research might decidedly work to identify present frames of classroom participation of both teachers and students. Future research might determine the connection of differing frames, if identified, and be used to bridge frames for further agreement. For example, online support platforms may enhance student involvement and participation. E-mail is a common method students and instructors use to communicate with one another, and social network sites, such as *Facebook* also allow students to continuously communicate with their instructors. *Facebook* is highly interactive and much different than other forms of mediated communication instructors may use to communicate with students (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2009). Ultimately, to enhance the classroom experience for everyone, notions of involvement for instructors and students need to align.

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Appendix

Table 1

Definition of Variables and Sample Items for In-Class Involvement

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Sample items</i>
Active Involvement	Relevant in-class verbal engagement between instructor and student(s), and among students.	offering opinions, discussions in small groups
Passive Involvement	Attentive in-class involvement in lieu of verbal engagement.	head nods, completing assignments
Instructor Factors	The role the instructor plays in encouraging student in-class involvement.	calls on students, is open and caring
Student Factors	Who the student is, as well as, how the student compares himself or herself to others in the classroom.	student rank, "I do it more than others"
Course Type & Structure	Perceptions of the course including enrollment, content, and grading policies.	related to major, smaller class
Outcomes of Involvement	The positive benefits for student in-class involvement.	enhances own learning, helps others and their learning

Table 2***Definition of Variables and Sample Items for In-Class Noninvolvement***

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Sample items</i>
Student Passivity	Passive engagement, no verbal involvement.	just take notes, prefers to only listen
Instructor Factors	How the instructor deters in-class engagement or student expectations of the instructor.	instructor just lectures, "I just want the instructor to talk"
Student Factors ~ Self	Who the student is or how students perceive the classroom experience.	hate the spotlight, don't want to be in class.
Student Factors ~ Others	How others in the class impact student in-class involvement.	peer influence to be quiet, rely on others to talk
Alternatives to Involvement	What students do other than engage themselves in the classroom experience.	text-message, don't prepare
Course Type & Structure	How the course itself deters student in-class involvement.	class is a requirement, class is too large
Lack of Perceived Benefit	No incentive for in-class involvement.	it's not important, it is of no value
Fear of Negative Repercussions	The outcome of involvement may be too risky or it may harm the self-concept of the student.	fear of being wrong, don't want to be judged by others

Author's Note

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